

Forum: General Assembly 6 Legal Committee

Issue: Measures against foreign manipulation in domestic political institutions

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Introduction

Foreign manipulation of domestic political institutions has become one of the most pressing challenges to global democracy and international stability in the 21st century. Advances in digital communication, rapid globalization, and the increasing interdependence of states have created unprecedented opportunities for outside actors to interfere in the political affairs of sovereign nations. From targeted cyberattacks on electoral infrastructure to coordinated disinformation campaigns and covert financing of political parties, foreign interference undermines the fundamental principles of state sovereignty, the rule of law, and the right of peoples to determine their own political future.

Such manipulation is not confined to any single region or political system. Democratic and non-democratic states alike have reported attempts to sway elections, distort public debate, or influence legislative processes through illicit means. Social media platforms and artificial-intelligence-driven content distribution have amplified the speed and scale of false narratives, while the anonymity of online spaces allows malicious actors to conceal their identities and evade accountability. The consequences are profound: diminished public trust in government, weakened electoral legitimacy, heightened polarization, and, in some cases, civil unrest or violence.

The United Nations Charter, particularly Article 2(7), enshrines the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of states. Likewise, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the right of every citizen to participate in genuine, periodic elections free from external coercion. Yet the current international legal framework does not provide a binding treaty or universally accepted mechanism to prevent or punish foreign manipulation. Existing measures—such as voluntary cybersecurity norms, regional information-sharing agreements, and national election-security programs—remain fragmented and insufficient to address the rapidly evolving tactics of foreign interference.

Definition of Key Terms

Foreign Manipulation

Any deliberate action by a foreign government, entity, or individual intended to influence another state’s political processes or outcomes, including election interference, covert funding, or cyber operations, is prohibited under the principle of non-intervention in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter.

Domestic Political Institution

The formal structures that organize political life within a state—such as legislatures, electoral commissions, political parties, and courts—whose independence is protected by international norms like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 25.

Disinformation

Intentionally false or misleading information spread to distort public opinion or policy decisions; recognized as a growing cybersecurity threat by the UN General Assembly's 2020 resolution A/RES/74/247 on information and telecommunications security.

Cyber Interference/Cyberattack

Unauthorized digital intrusion or disruption (e.g., hacking voter databases or election servers) aimed at altering political outcomes; addressed in the Tallinn Manual on International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations as a potential violation of state sovereignty.

Covert Political Financing

Hidden or disguised funding provided by foreign actors to parties, candidates, or advocacy groups to sway political decisions, contrary to the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) Article 7 on transparency in political financing.

Sovereignty

The right of states, as guaranteed by Article 2(1) of the UN Charter, to conduct their internal affairs—including the administration of elections—free from external interference, provided they comply with international obligations under treaties such as the ICCPR.

Hybrid Warfare

A strategy combining cyberattacks, disinformation, and economic pressure to destabilize another state's political system; cited by NATO and the EU as a modern security challenge requiring coordinated defence measures.

Background Information

Historical Evolution of Foreign Interference

Attempts to influence another state's politics are not new. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in covert funding of political parties and propaganda campaigns abroad. Earlier examples include colonial powers manipulating leadership transitions in newly independent states. These precedents show that while technology changes, the strategic motive to sway another nation's political direction remains constant.

Modern Tactics and Emerging Technologies

Today, foreign manipulation is accelerated by digital platforms and advanced cyber tools. State-sponsored hackers target voter databases and government networks, while coordinated disinformation campaigns use bots and artificial intelligence to amplify false narratives. The 2016 U.S. presidential election, interference claims in African and

European elections, and recent deepfake incidents illustrate how low-cost, high-impact tactics undermine trust in democratic institutions worldwide.

International Response and Legal Gaps

Existing international instruments—such as the UN Charter’s Article 2(7) on non-intervention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25), and UN General Assembly resolutions on cybersecurity (e.g., A/RES/74/247)—affirm the right to free and fair elections. Regional frameworks like the EU’s Code of Practice on Disinformation and the African Union’s Convention on Cyber Security provide guidance, yet there is no binding global treaty specifically addressing foreign political manipulation. This legal vacuum leaves states reliant on voluntary norms and bilateral agreements, creating uneven protection and limited accountability.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

European Union (EU)

The European Union actively engages in regulating digital campaigning to enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust in elections through legislative frameworks like the Digital Services Act (DSA), Media Freedom Act (MFA), Trade and Technology Partnership Agreement (TTPA), and the AI Act. The European Union organizes election observation missions worldwide, deploying over 180 since 2000, supported by projects like Election Observation and Democracy Support (EODS), which builds the European Union’s capacity for electoral monitoring.¹

African Union (AU)

The African Union also promotes electoral forums that foster transparency and democratic governance within its 54 member states. In addition, the African Union conducts an increased election observation mission, supporting technical assistance programs for electoral commissions and advocating for inclusion and gender equality in elections across Africa. It also works closely with regional blocs and local stakeholders to mediate in post-election conflicts and enhance peacebuilding, increasing the feasibility and accessibility of their programs.

Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity (GNSEI)

The Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity focuses on improving electoral integrity through knowledge sharing, research, and collaboration. The program facilitates peer learning among election management bodies and civil society organizations to improve transparency and fight corruption within the electoral processes. GNSEI also tracks global trends impacting elections, such as misinformation and technological threats, providing tailored support to countries at risk.

United States of America (USA)

The USA supports democratic elections internationally through funding, technical assistance, and election observation programs primarily via the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department. Other establishments include building cyberdefenses and secure electoral infrastructures to combat foreign interference. Thus, the United States of America also promotes voter education, transparent political finance, and strengthens institutions that uphold election laws. The USA also partners with

¹ *Communications, Strategic.* “EU Election Observation Missions.” EEAS, 25 Sept. 2025, www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-election-observation-missions-1_en

non-governmental organizations like the Carter Center and IFES to deliver technical and civic election support globally.

United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom also fosters electoral democracy through electoral assistance, such as, UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), focusing on election observation, monitoring, and supporting electoral reforms in fragile states. The United Kingdom funds programs aimed at combating misinformation and fostering inclusive participation in elections. Hence, supporting civil society engagement and the development of democratic institutions to strengthen accountability and electoral transparency.

Viable Solutions

Legal and institutional frameworks may be established to ensure transparency and the cohesiveness of the democratic electoral element. Member States could establish and regularly update clear and comprehensive electoral laws that comply with international democratic standards. Ensuring independent, impartial, and well-resourced election management bodies to administer elections free from political influence. The pathway provides an accessible, fair, and transparent dispute to resolve the issue at hand.²

Democracy could also be included with the adoption of wide-ranging voter participation through inclusive policies, especially focusing on marginalized groups and women. Promoting civic education and continuous public communication to foster trust and transparency around elections. Supporting civil society organizations that work to counter hate speech, harassment, and violence related to elections.

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